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THE AFRICAN IN AMERICA.

TO FIND HIS TRUE POSITION, AND PLACE HIM IN IT, THE *174*
MEDIA ON WHICH THE NORTH AND SOUTH MIGHT MEET
IN A PERMANENT AND HAPPY SETTLEMENT.

This nation appears evidently near a crisis, in which the forms of our past policy, in regard to the Africans among us, must encounter a change. A great upheaval—a bloody civil war, having reference to that race, has so commingled and dissolved the political elements, that they are now in a plastic state, and ready to be moulded for futurity—well or ill, as wisdom or folly shall rule the hour. Light is needed, and will be welcome, even should it come glimmering from an earthen vase—long used, and ready to mingle with its native dust.

Our subject is the African race as existing in this nation, North and South; and the great question underlying it is—what, considering their peculiar characteristics, ought to be their condition in our social system? And we conceive that the inquiry would become simplified, if the statesman should first look at it in the single aspect of righteous dealing to the race; for, if he find what this would be, he may surely expect that in following it out, he would produce a state of things among us, good for all; for good and right, duty and expediency, as God sees them, are one.

Said the eloquent Henry Ward Beecher, (who has recently modified his views respecting the negroes,) “If I had been God, I would not have made them at all; but since He who is wiser than all of us put together has seen fit to make them, and bring them here, what are you going to do with them?”* Bating a touch of profanity, we would thank Mr. Beecher for this candid statement of the case, indicating, as it does, the great error of fanaticism. God grant it may see and retrace

* A highly respectable lady who heard him, related this to me, and to others.

Wise Ruler, not only by following out the indications of His will in His works of nature, but in submitting to the dispensations of His righteous providence. He has not only made the negro as he is, but He has placed him here, and in such numbers *that he cannot now be removed*; and our first duty concerning him is to settle his true position among us.

There is an ulterior object, dear to the heart of Christian philanthropists, especially those of the African race, which looks to their ultimate removal to Liberia. This should not be lost sight of; but it can by no possibility go forward but at a rate too slow to make much difference in the account of what is now to be done with the Africans of America. They amount to four millions, *and they cannot be sent away, for the sufficient reason that VOLUNTARILY THEY WILL NOT GO*. Free or slave, they prefer to remain where they are. Among the free blacks of the North, the Colonization Society has long been setting forth the advantages of their quitting the useless strife for equal position with the whites, and telling them how much better it would be for them to go back to the country of their fathers—where the abilities of such black men as Roberts and Benson have already shown that their intellectual powers are equal to the founding and governing of a nation. How eloquently have Crummell and others shown them that they may not only acquire wealth and position, but benefit their race, and serve humanity at large, by going thither to join and aid their brethren! Yet how few have listened to the appeal;—and as regards the sending of the slaves of the South to Liberia, (a few instances to the contrary,) we find that they are unwilling to go, even when masters are willing to send them.

Said a Virginia chambermaid to me in 1832, when I asked her “what do your people think about the new plan of your being sent to Liberia?” “Why, they thought well of it at first, and Aunt Flora and her husband, when their master gave them the chance, went with all their children; but after a year we had this word from them—that we had better stay and eat grass in old Virginia than to come there.” In 1846, during a tour through the slave States, I learned many facts on this, and cognate subjects. One which I received from the excellent Judge McGhee, of Woodville, Mississippi, I relate as the representative of a class. “James,” said he to a colored servant of middle age, “you have served me faithfully, you have deserved your freedom, and I now offer it to you, advising you to go to Liberia.” “Will master go to

Liberia?" said the servant. "No, James, I cannot leave home." "Then if master can't go, I can't; all I want is to be as I have been, and live with master."

If, then, the servants of good Southern masters are useful, happy, and contented, why are we not to consider that the problem is already solved, and theirs is, in reality, the true position of the American Africans? It might be so, if all masters, like these, were, in their treatment to them, governed by kindness and Christianity; and if death and change were not the order of the world. And, indeed, it is not our voice which would ever alter these affectionate relations between good masters and good servants—who, indeed, ought not to be called slaves and slave-holders—but we wish the whole system to become modified, so that the barbarous laws of slavery, under which the race are liable to great abuses, many actually suffering them, may be abrogated and succeeded by those of a civilized character, in which the true rights of the black man shall be recognised and duly guarded by law. That the African is a man, all believe; and what is it but a barbarism to say, as has been said, that he has not a right in this country which the white man is bound to respect? That the husband has no right to his wife; the father and mother no right to the child—that all fathers, mothers, and children, though accustomed to indulgences, may be taken, should they chance to lose the best of masters, or he become poor, and sold separately into distant lands; or, still worse, when the slave-collector, sent by the spirit of gain, comes to buy human herds for some hard service in distant unhealthy lands, these plantation slaves may then be collected and penned up like cattle for a fair; and how is manhood degraded when the slave is set up on a block and shown off to be sold as a chattel to the highest bidder! and childhood is there—and womanhood—thrice degraded!

If we would purge away slavery by taking from the laws the gross faults by which they are deformed, it is not that the watchful care which the good master affords to his servant, and which his dependent spirit and improvident nature makes him need, should be destroyed; nor yet that the master should be deprived of his right to the services of a race whom otherwise he could not provide for or protect; but that there should be limitations to this power made by law; and guards fixed which shall shield the negro in case of the death or poverty of his master, as well as against his abuses:—in fine, to use

the language of the Rev. Dr. Fuller, of Baltimore, that "masters should become guardians of their slaves and extend over them a parental government;" and that *the race* be thus raised from the condition of slavery to that of a *regulated servitude*; and this on the principle that though the master owns the time, according to restrictions of law, yet he does not own the man,—he belongs to God. This we believe would place the negroes in their true position; and it is exactly the one which every good master, and especially every good mistress, at the South would desire to see established by law, and which, if it were established, the South would be honored, and humanity everywhere would rejoice. We are persuaded that this change is possible, and that it might be brought about by a tribunal composed of the best minds of such American statesmen as are thoroughly acquainted with the condition of the country and the character of the race to be dealt with;* and we say this in the confident hope that if such a change were cordially entered upon by the South, it would form the basis of a permanent settlement of the great question at issue between the North and the South, and eventually bring improvement and happiness to the colored race; whereas we believe that to emancipate them, in their present condition, would be likely to result, first in misery and confusion, and next in their final extermination. [For a continuation of this subject, see Note B.]

Here we wish to meet by facts an anticipated objection from those who maintain that the negro is wronged unless he has absolute freedom. Two wealthy slave-holders, of Virginia, becoming conscientiously imbued with the opinion that they were then living in the commission of sin, emigrated with their slaves to western New York; and, together, purchased a fine tract of land on one of the most beautiful lakes in the State. They laid it out into small farms, and built comfortable houses for the negroes, with places for worship and instruction. Here the liberated slaves were to enjoy their paradise of freedom. But alas, they managed ill, and were neither prosperous nor happy. And although at first their benefactors would wind them up whenever they ran down, yet they at length became discouraged, and convinced that their labors were hopeless; and they must abandon their generous scheme as a failure.†

*Such men, for example, as the Rev. Dr. Fuller, of Baltimore.

†I had this account last winter from General Swift. I have endeavored to give it exactly as he related it, but if there should be mistakes they would doubtless be mine, for he described from personal knowledge.

The abolition of the mild form of slavery which existed in New England* and New York at and after the Revolution, was an honest outburst of alarmed conscientiousness. But with facts as they now stand developed, it may fairly be questioned whether it did not produce, especially to the negroes, injury, where good was intended. The venerable Stephen Van Rensselaer, former patroon of Albany, mourned in his later days for the share he had taken in it; for he said "there were then forty of these home servants to the manor born, and I have lived to see every one of them go into the gutter."† So said the late Colonel Van Ness, formerly of New York, respecting the colored dependents of the wealthy and extensive family to which he belonged; and so have said many others.

And here we remark, as accounting in part for the differences of opinion which prevail among us on the African question, that a singular and unaccountable difference exists among the individual negroes of the African tribes. The characteristic of the masses, as shown by Dr. Livingstone and others, is unquestioning obedience to their chiefs. But whence come the chiefs, endued as they are with the vast knowledge and extensive cares which appertain to their governments? Above all, many of these chiefs have the mental element of a great will, and they exercise it without any touch of conscientiousness. Dr. Livingstone asked Matiamuo why he sent to such a great distance for certain of his subjects. "To kill them," was the answer of the chief. "There are too many of them, and I want to thin them out." Yet, though suspecting his cruel designs, his subjects would follow their instinct of obedience, and come when he sent for them. This difference between the chief and his subjects among Africans seems to me as difficult to be accounted for, as royalty among the bees. And if, in the guardianship of a master over them, he should find indications that there are among them any born for *queen bees*, their aspirations for freedom should be encouraged, for otherwise they would be likely to become dangerous. These ideas may be somewhat visionary, but, that great inequality in the genius and talents of the race exists, none can doubt. Those who possess superior abilities are all needed in Liberia, and let them be helped thither. In Canada, they make an unwholesome population.

*A capital description of the former condition of the few petted negroes of New England exists in a work, "*The Minister's Wooing*," by Mrs. H. Beecher Stowe.

†For the truth of this fact I refer to the Rev. Dr. Campbell, of Albany.

The former part of this subject has addressed itself to the South; this last part we address to the North. The fortunes of war have thrown a large number of Southern slaves into the hands of the Government. What is to be done with them? Will not the President and Congress appoint commissioners to find for them that position which in all righteous dealing shall be decided to be for them the happiest and most useful? They could not be sent to Liberia unless by previous training they had become fitted to be good citizens there; otherwise, as was the case with the captured negroes already sent, their board and teaching must first be paid for. If the liberated slaves on the cultivated banks of Seneca lake could not, with all the appliances furnished them by their kind benefactors, make headway for themselves, surely the Government would not be so cruel as to set them free without any guardian care over them. If they do, the Northern States will soon be following the example of Illinois and others, and making cruel laws to keep out all Africans. What then remains but that you, my brethren and sisters, Christian patriots and philanthropists of the North, should be appealed to; that, regarding these contrabands, you, according to your ability and the situation of your families, each take one or two of them, perhaps a married pair, to your homes, and thus let us divide the responsibility which rests upon us, that they shall be cared for, and their children duly instructed; then in ten or fifteen years, for their improvement requires time, they will become fitted to go to Liberia, and will have earned from you the means: which of course the Government agents who would on this supposition have bound them to you, will see that you are under legal obligation to perform. But if in the mean time your contrabands, having it at their option to go, prefer staying with you, as your permanent, faithful, and attached servants, you to support them until death, we see no reason why in this case laws should not be made to sanction the arrangement; and if sound and able minds were employed to make the laws under which the African may, at the North, find his true position, not of slavery, for we repudiate the word and the thing, but of a regulated servitude to a guardian-master, or mistress, we see no reason why these might not thus find what they cannot depend on in their present system, the comfort and respectability of permanent and contented servants. The American of revolutionary descent is no one's servant but his own—and happy were those families where, in the simplicity of the olden time, the mother

and daughters served themselves and their families. But increase of wealth, with the influx of foreigners, has changed these times, and now the unrelia- bleness of domestic servants is the common complaint of Northern housekeepers—and not without reason.

The foreigners, on whom we must rely, having in view ultimate independence, generally stay with us but a short season ; and while they remain, how few of us are there who have been fortunate enough so to attach them to ourselves, that the interests of their own kindred will not be preferred to ours ! And many a tenderly-educated Northern woman, brought, by a wealthy and hospitable husband as a happy bride to a magnificent home, falls a sacrifice to the consequent want of permanent domestic arrangements. She finds herself at some unfortunate moment, when her house is filled with guests, with not a single servant. Her ambition to please her husband, and make his house acceptable to his friends, obliges her to tax herself to fill their several vacant offices. Nature, unused to the effort, revolts, and she either dies, or lives a miserable invalid. And if such a one should yet remain on earth, what could her wealthy husband, with his extensive accommodations, do so well as to take to his home some of these contrabands, who could be supervised and taught by a mistress, who would thus have been brought to appreciate and love them for their useful domestic virtues ?

American families who see that all which is here stated is true, might yet hesitate, fearing that European nobility might denounce them as having slaves to “fan them,” &c. But our regulated system of colored servitude would be no more slavery than that service to which they constantly hold the hereditary servants of their own national blood ; nor would you keep them at a greater distance, or more hold your families disgraced by intermarriages with servants than do they. Yet these English homes are regarded throughout the world as the abodes of comfort and elegant enjoyment ; and this cannot be, except where there are permanent servants, knowing each their several places, and contented with their own condition.

We do not wish to intermeddle with English servitude ; neither do we desire their interference with ours. Their fathers, as allowed by Providence, forced the African race upon us ; and their statecraft has long, for the bad purpose of dividing us because “the safety of Europe requires it,”

sought, and not vainly, to sow hatred and dissension among us; and now, regardless of all we must suffer, both North and South, fearing to lose the ultimate end of their efforts, their money, and their emissaries—the division of our Republic; now they talk of acknowledging the independence of the South, on the condition that the South shall set free their African domestics! thus introducing confusion and misery into their homes, and probably causing the ultimate destruction of the dependent race, whom they have long loved as their faithful and devoted servants.

Daughters of the South! plead with your sons and husbands, and avert these horrors while yet you may. Turn not away from your kindred of the North, whose blood flows intermingled with yours in a thousand channels, and whose memories of past national glories must forever be identified with yours. Although you have hated them, it was because you have been deceived, and falsely persuaded that they wished to bring that ruin upon your homes which, it would seem, you are now preparing to bring upon them yourselves. Yet the North has never hated you. If she has waged war, she entered upon it against her will, because she had no other means to keep us all from worse than Mexican anarchy. Oh then relent, and no longer allow this cruel hatred to fill your hearts. Save your country! save yourselves—your families—and doom not to destruction that affectionate race, who, if we all treat them as we ought, and no longer injure them by our dissensions, may yet become more happy and more elevated in mind and character than ever before; and *if placed* and sustained in their TRUE POSITION, they may yet become an element of strength and increased civilization to a redeemed and renovated nation.

EMMA WILLARD.

BALTIMORE, *May* 23, 1862.

NOTES.

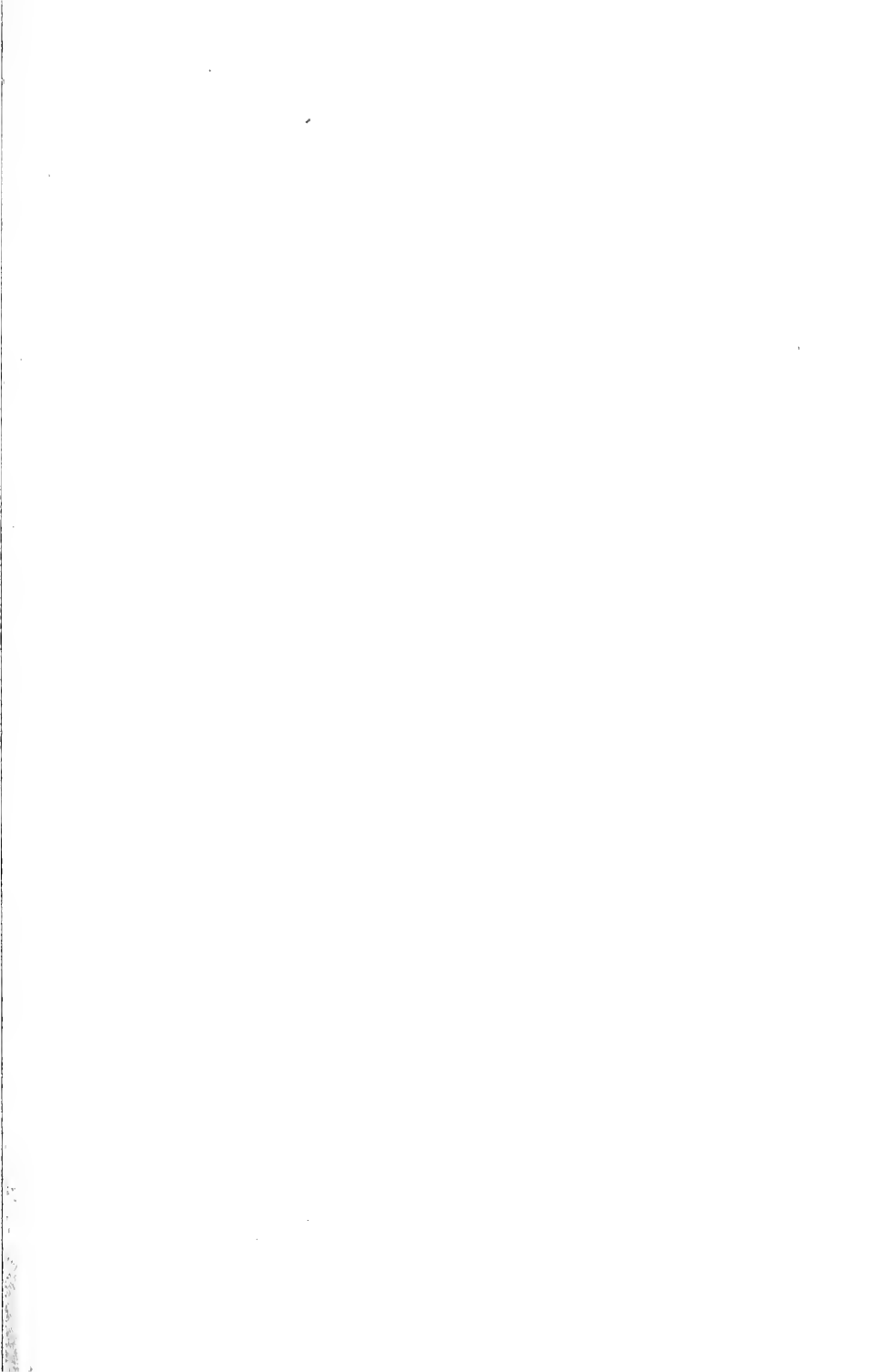
NOTE A.—There are, who believe that women should be made equal with men, in political rights;—and negroes with both. But would the sex have cause to thank these philanthropists, if, by giving them, during their lives, the fullest control of their property, and leaving to their husbands the duties of supporting them with their children, and paying their debts, they discontinued marriage? Or, will the colored race have cause to thank them, if they should succeed in putting such conditions upon the whites as should prevent their voluntarily taking over them that parental guardianship which, to their improvident and affectionate natures, becomes the source both of their happiness and their usefulness? But if they are right, still the course we indicate is the best for the race which the times admit of; for, that the North should buy the negroes of the South, is not now feasible, whatever it may be hereafter; and this would therefore constitute the best practical measure of GRADUAL EMANCIPATION.

NOTE. B.—It may be recollected, that last winter I presented a memorial to Congress, pleading for peace, in the name of my sex. My original design was expressed in a memorial longer than that presented; and it brought forward the plan of settlement herein, much more fully developed. The following are extracts from the first, or larger, memorial, not presented:

“When we have become sufficiently humbled by the chastisement which God is now inflicting upon us, then shall we be ready to inquire for the RIGHT,—knowing that whatever is of RIGHT, is of God. In it as in HIM, there is UNITY. Its path is straight, and if we can find it, all—North and South, East and West—may walk together in it. Every step towards it is a gain—to seek for Right in order to do it, is to draw near to God. Suppose His voice should now audibly inquire of all and of each, ‘Are you willing to do right?’ and there came from a chastened people the universal reply, ‘I am!’ and again should the voice divine inquire, ‘Are you ready to be satisfied with others when they do right?’ and again there should come up a universal response, ‘We are,’—then what would remain would be *to agree on some method of finding out what the right in this case is, or of making the nearest possible approach to it*; so that those who have the care of the colored race may do it; and which, they thus doing, all others in the Union are to be satisfied in heart,—to approve and to uphold. And this *regardless of the sneers of foreign politicians, (who wish to divide us, so that our power as a nation may not become inconvenient to them,) and the more subtle influences of poetical flourishes, whether found in the Declaration of Independence, or in the beautiful works of Cowper, Campbell, and others.* The abuses of negro servitude, we are no more obligated by these resolves to uphold, than we are bound to justify the tyranny of husbands because we defend the institution of marriage.”

The memorial then recommends a Board of Commissioners from the North and South, to act “as guardians of the colored race, and arbiters for the just and peaceful settlement of the Slavery question, on the foundation of *right*, to be done by the one party, and to be firmly and boldly upheld by the other.”

In the two things necessary to the accomplishment of an object—the *will* and the *way*—that which we here seek to create, is the will. Let that appear, and the genius of American jurists and statesmen would leap forth gladly to find the legal and expedient way: for this would be the glorious work of giving us once more a united country, increased in wisdom and strength.



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